DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 807 AL 002 330

AUTHOR Sepulveda, Betty R.
TITLE Teaching the Educationally Disadvantaged Hispano Child at the K-3 Level.
NOTE 4p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
DESCRIPTORS *Culturally Disadvantaged, Elementary Education, Language Learning Levels, *Nonstandard Dialects, *Reading Readiness, *Spanish Speaking, *Standard Spoken Usage, *Tenl

ABSTRACT

Contending that language is the single greatest block to developing a deprived Hispano child's full learning potential, this primary teacher proposes a re-examination of reading readiness procedures at the K-3 level. She maintains that disadvantaged children are not non-verbal, as they are often mis-categorized, but have tremendous difficulty assimilating the middle-class learning structure, because they actually speak a "poverty dialect," quite different from standard spoken English. Because of this, the traditional approach to teaching reading is fundamentally wrong on two counts: (1) the present curriculum does not provide for a transition program to bridge the formal language gap that exists initially between disadvantaged and middle-class children, and (2) teaching reading before formal language usage establishes a substantial language barrier which inhibits learning in all areas. (Learning to read is actually the third step in language learning, and should only be attempted after the listening and speaking skills have been acquired.) Based on the assumption that pupils must be able to understand and speak formal standard English before they can profit from public school education, the author has developed a methodology called "Formal Language Learning" to help the pupil acquire formal spoken usage through functional activities. (FB)

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TEACHING THE EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED HISPANO CHILD AT THE K-3 LEVEL

Presented by Betty R. Sepulveda, teacher at Greenlee Elementary School, Denver, Colo.

ED036807

RATIONALE

Failure to educate the Hispano child is due in part to the fact that the type of educational problem these children face when they enter school has not been thoroughly understood.

Hispano spokesmen say
these children need specific programs, but they tend to complicate the problem somewhat by stressing that this child is initially a Spanish-speaker. At present, what we know with certainty about the disadvantaged Hispano child is that he speaks some form of non-standard language. However, what the Hispano spokesmen fail to realize is that by stressing a possible non-existent language difference so strongly, the Hispano child's educational problem is magnified needlessly by giving the connotation that the solution is so complicated that the average teacher cannot be instrumental in solving the educational problem short of learning Spanish before attempting to teach Hispano children successfully.

According to research, the larger per cent of Hispano children bring to school a language problem that is not caused because of knowing Spanish, but one that has resulted from learning what linguists call a non-standard usage of English which in effect is a proverty dialect. The 'poverty dialect' develops among Hispanos, as these, in an urban setting try to learn English; but occupying the lower socio-economic strata of society find social interaction only with other members of the poverty group - the Negro, the Indian, the poor illiterate white, and the oriental. The Hispano learns English from other disadvantaged children who speak a non-standard form of English; he then brings to the classroom the English which may resemble the language of the Negro, if he learned it from the Negro, or it may resemble the language of the illiterate white, if he learned it from the illiterate white. Dr. J.F. Sherk Jr. substantiates this fact when he states, "...most 'ghetto' children bring to the school the language of the community into which they are born."

Contrary to common belief the Hispano child who is neither a monolingual Spanish-speaker, nor is well integrated into American society HAS a similar language problem to those of other disadvantaged minorities belonging to the poverty group.

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According to W.R. Holland, the 'bi-cultural' Hispano sub-standard language speaker occupies the middle range of the acculturation continuum, and composes the greater number of intellectually retarded Hispanos that attend our schools.

Upon detailed investigation, I have discovered that this is due to a series of false assumptions held by both parents and educators. Parents, when asked if their child speaks English, respond affirmatively, not realizing that the form of English the child speaks is inadequate in a formal setting; educators, on the other hand, assume that the sub-standard English the Hispano child brings to the class is adequate to profit from instruction, and the lack of communication between the teacher and the Hispano pupil goes on unnoticed or mis-interpreted as SLOWNESS.

Teachers say
these children are slow, the slowness is interpreted as a lack of intellectual ability and as a lack of experience due to cultural deprivation. However, upon investigation we find the contrary to be true. Both research and classroom experimentation indicate slowness is due to definite specifics. The Hispano suffers academic and formal language deficiencies rather than cultural deprivation, intellectual inabilities, or lack of experiences. The term 'cultural deprivation'

is inadequate when used in relation with the Hispano, for it regards the child's home environment as void. The Hispano's home environment is different but far from void.

Frank Riessman classifies this child as a 'Slow Gifted Learner'. He brings out that it is often contended that deprived children are non-verbal, that they think in a slow inadequate matter, and that they cannot conceptualize, but that while there are elements of truth in this, the picture is distorted.

I contend that if educators view slowness diagnostically, it will reveal that slowness is due to a lack of formal language skills with which to communicate, think adequately and conceptualize.

The NCTE, upon detailed scrutinization of over 190 government-funded reading programs for disadvantaged, that operated in the 1960's throughout the nation, state the "... LANGUAGE IS THE GREATEST BLOCK TO THE DEPRIVED'S FULL POTENTIAL." They also found that according to scores in academic potential and reading readiness tests, the gap between the disadvantaged and middle-class child is at its smallest when both enter school. The GAP however widens, as the two groups progress in school, thus indicating that the basic problem in educating the disadvantaged child is that the schools have been - because of lack of appropriate educational approaches - unable to overcome this initial gap.

PROBLEM

In our society the middle-class child comes to school to learn to read. The Hispano child DOES NOT, he comes to learn a new form of English if he is to function in a middle-class setting. However, educators are unaware of this vital difference; and the problem is almost hopelessly compounded by beginning instruction in reading, which is the third phase in the sequence of language, without first teaching the Listening and Speaking phases as preparation to acquiring formal language usage with which to communicate and understand classroom instruction.

CONCLUSION

What is happening is that a cycle is formed where the lack of communication, the inadequate instructional approaches used, the language sequence level at which the child is expected to perform initially - without adequate readiness preparation - promote pupil retardation, and the lack of successful experiences in the classroom and fruitful participation promote pupil alienation to the point that he comes to resist learning.

PREMISE

Based on the premise that the intellectual retardation problem among disadvantaged originated at the K-3 level of schooling and that it is perpetuated thereafter because:

(1) the present curriculum does not provide for a transitional type program to help bridge the formal language gap that exists initially; and
(2) that attempts to teach reading without first teaching formal language usage nourishes a language barrier to the degree that it blocks out progress in all areas of learning;

I have developed a Formal Language Learning Program which helps the poverty child transcend from his culture to the middle-class setting of the school successfully via language in about 9 - 12 weeks, during the reading readiness period in grade one.

OBJECTIVES

Formal Language Learning, is a program for children who speak a non-standard form of English. Pupils must be able to understand and speak formal standard English before they can communicate in school and before they can profit from instruction.

Formal Language Learning has been designed to help the teacher present a well-structured program for teaching a new form of English as though it were a second language. It is based on a merged educational philosophy which is both authoritative and progressive. The learning by doing predominates because it is the one the Hispano child adheres to the majority of the time. The authoritative is used since the child comes from an authoritative environment where adults dominate his actions; hence he expects, understands, and appreciates sharply defined, highly structured situations and clear-cut rules. This helps him to be more receptive to the classroom environment as he is taught how to use freedom of action.

The objectives of the program are these:

1. To help the pupil acquire formal usage with which to communicate in the classroom.

2. To help the pupil become familiar with the characteristic patterns of intonation in formal standard SPOKEN English.

3. To expose the pupil to a wide spectrum of oral experiences.

4. To involve the pupil in functional activities which help him develop listening and speaking skills in formal standard English.

5. To help the pupil acquire use of language patterns related to the subject matter content in each specific lesson.

6. To help the pupil use the new form of English in functional, meaningful situations.

7. To help the pupil realize that both forms of language can be useful to him - the language he speaks, and the new form he is being taught.

8. To help the pupil become aware of the many possible ways to use language.

9. To help the pupil discover which language usage is most effective for particular situations.

10. To give the pupil an opportunity to make language work for him.

In Formal Language Learning the emphasis is placed on learning the basic patterns of English rather than on acquiring a large vocabulary. The vocabulary that is stressed is the vocabulary he will encounter in the pre-primer and primer that will be used to teach reading. New words can always be taught as the need arises, but he is first taught to gain reasonable control of the basic sentence patterns of English.

METHOD

Realizing that measurement devices are inadequate in assessing the Hispano's language development level of performance when he enters school; and that -at present- there are no reliable criteria with which to appraise his language, The Formal Language Learning Program proceeds to expose the pupil to a wide spectrum of academically oriented language experiences utilizing specific language patterns to establish communication. The academically oriented language experiences are based on the listening and speaking phases of language at the reading readiness level of instruction These do not reject the child's first form of speech - be it a first language, or a non-standard form - but simply teach a new form of English.

Carl E. Bereiter stresses the logical fact that any educational program that claims to help children overcome their educational handicaps must be able to show not just normal rate of progress, but a superior rate in order to make up the time taken to remedy the handicap. By the time the deprived children are five years old they are typically one to two years retarded in formal language development, and if the child who starts out behind is to catch up, he has to progress at a faster than normal rate. To accomplish this superior rate of progress needed, the program teaches the regular reading readiness, already embodied in the curriculum, plus the new form of English needed to establish communication- all in the same length of time.

In addition, the superior rate of progress is further achieved by establishing specific routine procedures for classroom management, by correlating subject matter motivated by the game format structured type lesson, and by utilizing individualized centers of learning to replace the lifeless "ditto sheet" - busy work with physically involved tasks through the use of manipulative materials which evoke a high degree of intrinsic motivational pupil participation which here-to-fore has remained - among deprived children - an untapped resource.